

# Oliver ready for more after shaking off nearly-man tag

English golfer finally hits the big time — with his wife hiding in the gallery. **Nick Pitt reports**

## GOLF

ON THE night before the most important round of golf of his life, Oliver Wilson hardly slept. Nor did Lauren, his wife.

Wilson was in St Andrews with a three-shot lead in the Alfred Dunhill Links championship. He had never won on the Tour but had been runner-up nine times. Even in a game that can be so cruel, his fall had been spectacular. In 2008, he was

a Ryder Cup player. In 2014, he was on the Challenge Tour, missing cuts. His on-course earnings were a paltry £20,000.

Lauren Wilson, back home in Great Bookham, Surrey, knew all this. She knew her husband had begun to question whether he would ever get back. And she knew how he had been afflicted in 2011 by a stomach ulcer and two internal parasites of unknown origin, one of them not normally found in

humans; and how at the start of last season he had broken his wrist and been sidelined for two months.

Even Lauren, the American girl who had been a Wag at the 2008 Ryder Cup and had married Wilson on New Year's Eve 2010, started to wonder if there would ever be light at the end of the tunnel. She was busy as project manager for the building work on the house they had recently bought. But keeping a brave face when Oliver came back home after another missed cut was not easy.

While Wilson went through it all in his mind on Saturday night, his wife debated whether she should fly up to be with him. "My parents were over from the States," she said. "We watched the Saturday play on

TV, and they kept repeating that he had been nine times a runner-up. I felt I should stay at home, not to put him off. But some friends said I had to go, that it might be the chance of a lifetime. That night, I took my dad to the airport because he had to fly home and we bought two tickets for my mum and me. We had three hours' sleep and then we were off again to Gatwick.

"I was so nervous I couldn't eat. We got to St Andrews and caught up with Oliver when he was on the second green." Lauren and her mother melted into the gallery. To ensure he did not spot them, they disguised themselves. Lauren wore a hat and sunglasses and kept herself well wrapped up in her coat.

Wilson dropped a stroke on

the fourth hole and by the time he reached the 10th his lead had gone. "We started wondering whether we should say something," Lauren said. "Then my mum shouted out, 'Come on Oliver Wilson' but he was talking to his caddie and didn't hear." On the 10th, waiting to play and wondering whether another chance was slipping away, Wilson encountered Rory McIlroy playing in the group ahead. The world No 1 strolled over. They had not seen each other for three years, which was not surprising, since they had been moving in opposite directions in the golfing firmament. McIlroy told Wilson to "hang in there". He birdied the 10th and 11th.

"It is incredible how quickly things change," said Lauren. "In two holes he was

back in contention." The key moment came on the 16th hole, where he was left with 220 yards to the flag. It was too far for a four-iron, unless he crushed it. Wilson hit "the shot of my life" and made a birdie.

After that, he made a par save on the 17th and a par at the last. He then had to watch Tommy Fleetwood miss a 6ft putt that would have brought a playoff had it dropped. It did not. Wilson had won at last. As he made his way from the 18th green he was embraced by the person he assumed was back in Great Bookham, Lauren.

"I could be drunk for a while," Wilson said. "I've had a lot of champagne on ice over the years." He had a cheque for €625,787, had won his first European Tour title at the age of 34 and had secured his



New man: Oliver Wilson and his wife, Lauren, celebrate his win

Tour card for two years. He had been dreading going back to qualifying school. In the aftermath, Wilson talked about the bad times and gave much of the credit for his miracle to fellow professional, Robert Rock, who helped him work on his swing and made a few adjustments. "He has been a liferaft for us, a great coach and a great friend," said Lauren Wilson.

The champagne has been drunk and normality has resumed. Wilson flew to the Algarve to play in the Portugal Masters, where yesterday he missed the cut by a shot. Lauren returned to the building project. The gravel was being delivered; the joiner was finishing up. Bills need to be paid, of course. But that's no problem.



# Cilic in position to trump Murray

Croat knows rule book is in his favour as he targets World Tour Finals. **By Barry Flatman**

THE NEWLY crowned US Open champion, Marin Cilic, is an anomaly in tennis: a player perceived as one of the sport's good guys despite having served a suspension from the sport for failing a drugs test. However, his popularity in London could be severely tested if the small print in the ATP World Tour rules takes force.

Each day a new equation is thrown into the mathematical conundrum that will decide the eight players who contest the Barclays ATP World Tour Finals, which begin at London's O2 Arena on November 9.

Andy Murray appeared to do his chances no good by losing to David Ferrer in the Shanghai Rolex Masters but other players around the Scot exited early, including Cilic. It seems the Race to London will extend to the penultimate tournament of the year, the BNP Paribas Masters in Paris.

Cilic, like many a novice Grand Slam champion before him, has found returning to the treadmill of regular tour tennis a struggle since his triumph in New York. After beating Roger Federer in the US Open semi-final and then Kei Nishikori, he has won only two matches.

The 6ft 6in Croat lost to Murray at last week's China Open in Beijing and then fell to his compatriot Ivo Karlovic in Shanghai. If he drops to ninth place in the race, a position below Murray, the rules decree it will be Cilic, with his US Open title, who will get a place among the esteemed eight rather than the British player.

Cilic says: "That rule might stop me being thought of as a nice guy in Britain. I have been talking to the guys from the ATP to get their interpretation of the rules and it seems if Stan [Wawrinka] finishes fourth

and I finish ninth, I will still get in."

Cilic now heads for the Kremlin Cup in Moscow. "After taking a couple of days to think, I'm ready to start playing good tennis," he said. "I'm very mindful of something Stan Wawrinka said this year; when you have Grand Slam champion behind your name, you always feel you need to be playing better than you actually are. I must combat that, I must remember the way I played to beat Federer was probably the greatest I'll ever play in my life."

Cilic accepts two things were crucial in him becoming a Grand Slam champion. One was the appointment of his Croatian hero Goran Ivanisevic as coach, the other the lessons learnt by his drug ban, initially nine months but reduced to four on appeal.

He tested positive for traces of the banned stimulant Nikethamide after his mother was sent to Monaco pharmacy to buy the brand of glucose tablets he had been taking for years. Unfortunately for Cilic the chemistry had changed and he did not read the package's small print.

"I never did anything on purpose," he said. "The time I had off gave me enough time to change my game. I worked with Goran, I listened to him and I learnt. The ban made me more fired up and mentally tougher. Goran is always telling me he made so many mistakes in his life and to take a lesson from those I've made."

All Cilic has to worry about as a Grand Slam champion is whether the British public will turn against him next month. He shouldn't be too concerned about that.



Cilic: in race for London

## RACE TO LONDON: TOP EIGHT QUALIFY

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 N Djokovic 8,980 pts (qualified)               | 8 M Raonic 3,750 (plays in Moscow this week)       |
| 2 R Federer 7,560* (qualified)                   | 9 D Ferrer 3,715 (plays in Vienna this week)       |
| 3 R Nadal 6,745 (qualified)                      | 10 A Murray 3,655 (plays in Vienna this week)      |
| 4 S Wawrinka 4,805                               | 11 G Dimitrov 3,450 (plays in Stockholm this week) |
| 5 K Nishikori 4,265                              | *Not including today's Shanghai final              |
| 6 M Cilic 3,990 (plays in Moscow this week)      |  |
| 7 T Berdych 3,945 (plays in Stockholm this week) |  |

Shanghai master: Roger Federer ended Novak Djokovic's 28-match winning run in China with a 6-4 6-4 win to set up today's final against Gilles Simon. Djokovic said the Swiss 'played a perfect match'

Swiss eyes the summit after rolling back the years to beat Djokovic, writes **Barry Flatman**

AN age-old Chinese proverb maintains that to get through the hardest journey, man need take only one step at a time but must always keep on walking. Roger Federer, for whom age clearly has no bounds, shows no signs of slackening his determined march for a year or two yet.

As Federer bids today at the Shanghai Rolex Masters to win the 81st singles title of his career, it is not inconceivable that the champion many have wrongly written off as a spent force could end 2014 as once

again the No 1 ranked player in the world. And this at the age of 33, when only Jimmy Connors and Andre Agassi of the great champions in recent decades were still subjecting themselves to the grind of the tour.

There are several factors that could influence that proposition: whether Novak Djokovic's impending paternal duties allow him to play the remainder of his schedule; just when Rafael Nadal undergoes surgery to remove his troublesome appendix and how long he requires to return to action; and whether Federer decides he is sufficiently fresh to con-

test the upcoming tournaments in his native Basel and thereafter Paris.

In the short term, if the unseeded Gilles Simon can stop Federer in today's final, then he must provide far sterner resistance than current No 1, Djokovic, who until coming face-to-face with Federer in the semi-final was looking to extend a 28-match winning-streak in China. The Serb's self-belief could not have been higher but he proved no match for Federer, who won 6-4 6-4.

Federer has a habit of breaking Djokovic's historic runs: at the 2011 French Open he ended a streak of 43 wins stretching all the way back to the previous year's Davis Cup final. "It's always more exciting when there's a lot more on the line," said the victorious Swiss. "You feel like two heavyweights walking out for a big fight. You wish it was this kind of an atmosphere every single night."

There was an aesthetically wonderful panache to Federer's play as he rolled back the years and played with an enthusiasm to attack, repeatedly gliding into the net and executing sharp volleys. A third and conclusive match point was the perfect example, the champion of 17 Grand Slams hitting an out-swinging kicked serve that forced Djokovic wide before taking a few split steps and sending a high rapier-like backhand yards out of the Serb's reach.

"Roger just outplayed me and had an incredible match," said Djokovic in more of a testament to his assailant than a lament for his own shortcomings. "Tonight is definitely one of the best matches he has played against me, that's for sure. He played a perfect match, amazing. He's playing as good as ever. Age does not really matter in his case. Tactically he was hitting the ball so well."

At the US Open last month and even after as he steered Switzerland to the Davis Cup final, Federer was still undecided whether he would even come to Shanghai and contest a Masters series tournament he has never previously won. Instead he felt the need for a holiday with his wife and two sets of twins. During a largely nocturnal week when he was repeatedly scheduled to play late at night, as he saved five match points in his opening fixture of the week against Argentina's Leonardo Mayer that extended into the morning's early hours, he might well have questioned his judgment.

Yet Federer's play against Djokovic was day-to-night in comparison. He took to court with a game plan to unsettle the top seed and defending champion, and it worked. After a handful of points Federer was dominating, pushing his illustrious opponent round the

court. Djokovic was clearly unsettled and his normally dependable forehand grew more errant and off-target as the match progressed.

Simon, who emphatically beat Spain's Feliciano Lopez 6-2 7-6 in his semi-final, has been re-energised in the past few weeks. He reached the last 16 of the US Open and the semi-finals in Tokyo. He is also one of the few players to have won as many matches as they have lost on hard court against Federer.

"Last time I played Roger, I lost 6-3 in the fifth in the French," said Simon. "I just know that I can do it. When I'm playing well, I can play at his level. The question is whether I will be able to do it tomorrow."

## ON TV TODAY

Gilles Simon v Roger Federer

9.30am Sky Sports 3

# Slattery looking for repeat success in global challenge

Experienced Irishman knows what it takes to win gruelling race, writes **Yvonne Gordon**

## SAILING

THE first leg of the Volvo Ocean Race kicked off yesterday from Alicante, Spain, when the seven Volvo Ocean 65s started their three-week race to Cape Town, the first part of a 38,739-mile circumnavigation of the globe.

The boats had a short race around the bay in light winds of seven or eight knots before

setting off for the second-longest leg of the nine-month race. Brunel Sailing led the way with Abu Dhabi Ocean Racing just seconds behind and they will have around 25 more days at sea.

The seven teams, including the all-female Team SCA, face a potentially treacherous first leg from Alicante to Cape Town. Over the 6,487 nautical miles, they will encounter difficult light-wind sailing conditions in the Mediterranean, possible

storms, tricky tactical choices entering the Atlantic, the light winds of the Doldrums and then a final week of high-speed surfing towards Cape Town.

This is the 12th edition of the race, which runs every three years. The entrants include Team Brunel, skippered by Bouwe Bekking; Dongfeng Race Team, skippered by Frenchman Charles Caudrelier, Mapfre skippered by Spaniard Iker Martinez and Team Alvimedica skippered by Charlie Enright of the US.

Irish sailor Justin Slattery is aboard Abu Dhabi Ocean Racing, skippered by Briton Ian Walker, and Irish photographer Brian Carlin is onboard reporter on Team Vestas Wind, skippered by Chris Nicholson of Australia. All eyes will be on the all-

female Team SCA, skippered by Sam Davis (GBR) — this is the first female team to take part in the race for 12 years and the team has been training intensively both on and off the water for the past 18 months.

Cork sailor Justin Slattery, 40, who has competed in four previous Volvo Ocean Races and was part of the winning ABN Amro crew in 2005/6, told The Sunday Times just before the start that he was looking forward to being out on the water — the Abu Dhabi Ocean Racing team clocked up a second place in the In-Port race in Alicante last week and they have since been focused on readying the boat to peak condition.

"We are feeling good about ourselves and now we just want to get going," he said. "It's looking like light winds

for the first couple of days which can be harder on the crew than strong winds because there are often more sail changes to be done.

"It's going to be tricky getting out of the Mediterranean and we will have to be on our guard — it will be easy to run out of breeze and get left behind by the fleet."

Kerryman Brian Carlin, 30, on Team Vestas Wind, said the enormity of the challenge ahead had just hit home right before the race. "I normally watch it on TV so the fact I am participating in it came as a bit of a shock, even though I've known for two months. We leave the dock and we don't come back. It's so exciting but certainly a mountain to climb. Baby steps and we'll get there." Overseeing the

proceedings at the leg start was principal race director Bill O'Hara, from Northern Ireland, who also ran the Pro-Am and In-Port races. Jon Bramley, of the Volvo Ocean Race organising team, says Ireland holds a special place in the hearts of the Volvo Ocean race, having supplied so many talented sailors over the years and with the two stopovers hosted in Galway in previous editions of the race.

"Justin Slattery is a formidable competitor, having won the race in 2005-06, and has taken part three other times," he said. "That's a huge amount of experience in a race in which every minute of onboard time over the years counts."

"I know that his skipper, Ian Walker, is going to rely on him heavily in his role as



Formidable competitor: Slattery set off on the nine-month race

bowman and helmsman. Brian Carlin, the onboard reporter for Team Vestas Wind, has the all-round media talents that we need to tell this race for a global media audience. "Through his work, our

followers can keep right up to date with what's going on when the boats are in the middle of some of the most remote waters of the world." The race will finish on June 27 next year in Gothenburg, Sweden.